



# Patton Museum Courts a New Generation

by John Rickey

Nestled in Keyes Park, Fort Knox, overlooking the route Morgan's Confederate Cavalry took on its raids into Union territory, lies the home of modern day cavalry and armor, the Patton Museum.

The museum attracts over 300,000 visitors a year. Surrounded by lush scenery and an assortment of international mounted and mobile weapon systems of the past, the museum reaches out to young and old alike, from 70-year-old sergeants of the past, to 10-year-old lieutenants of the future.

Hosting mock battles or showing off its collection to the viewing public is only part of its mission. With support from the Cavalry-Armor Foundation, corporate sponsors, volunteers, local tourism agencies, and the donations of generous visitors, the Patton Museum of Armor and Cavalry is our link to the past, educating armor warriors of the future in tactics and leadership.

Never is this link more evident than when present-day warriors host one of the many dedication or reunion ceremonies held in the park. When the morning sun burns off the mist shrouding the monuments to cavalry and armor, visitors can almost see the silhouettes of past warriors felled on the fields of honor, standing alongside the new mounted warriors honoring their comrades who have come to pay tribute.

"All you have to do to realize the importance of our facility is walk outside into the memorial park and admire the tributes to armor and cavalry units who have made this country safe," said John Purdy, director of the museum. "Thousands of former armor and cavalry soldiers have dedicated monuments to

their efforts on this field of remembrance, and as those veterans dwindle in numbers, it is up to the new generations of mounted warriors to ensure survivability of the museum."

Plans by Purdy and the foundation are more ambitious than just survival. Through its ongoing restoration projects, plans for future site renovations and additions, and work with state and local tourism bureaus to promote the Dixie corridor and Fort Knox's impact on the region, the museum staff has maintained high visibility as one of Kentucky's more popular tourist attractions.

"Visitors will notice a subtle shift in the museum's focus over the next few years, from a historical message to an educational focus," said Purdy. "There has been a shift in the demographics of America since Viet Nam, and the number of families in this country who have military ties or know someone in uniform has decreased dramatically since World War II and Korea. Without educating our visitors about the reasons for mounted combat and mounted warfare — how the perception was that armor's role decreased after World War II, and how armor proved its worth again on the Desert Storm battlefields — the necessity for a strong mounted force could be lost on the general public. Part of the museum's role is not only providing a historical perspective, but the museum staff now filters its exhibits for appropriateness and understandability to an ever-increasing, unfamiliar audience.

"Fort Knox and the entire mounted community could become isolated if we fail in our education mission."

To combat this possibility, the museum continues to acquire previously unobtainable equipment for displays by strengthening its ties to the international armor community. Recent additions include a German "Tiger" tank, and an M3 light tank obtained from Australia, a tank used in the Philippines against Japanese forces.

"The M3 is part of an exhibit in progress highlighting armor's first role in World War II," said Purdy. "Some of the first armor combat was seen by the Army National Guard in the withdrawal into Bataan in late 1941 and early 1942. This combat is almost the forgotten element of early armored warfare by U.S. forces, but Kentuckians from Harrodsburg are very familiar with those campaigns. Its Company B, 192d Tank Battalion was very involved in providing rear-guard action during the withdrawal into Bataan by holding crossroads and bridgeheads. Unlike the later overwhelming use of active armor in North Africa and European, it was not unusual to have Guard armored forces on the Pacific front lines while the Army built its armor force.

"Just as the Army grew its armor and cavalry force in WWII, we can't move forward and grow without the help of the new generation of mounted warriors," said Purdy.

As the museum moves forward to examine armor and cavalry since World War II, veterans of that conflict can rest assured that there will be no examination without inclusion of their accomplishments in shaping the force since their service in WWII. Their tactics, doctrine, and legacy have shaped the force of the future and nowhere is this



Patton's Cadillac limousine, above, is one of many exhibits focusing on the great armor general. At left, an ex-Nazi tank destroyer prowls Keyes Park prior to a July 4 reenactment. Below, an American infantry patrol closes in on the "Germans," actually members of a reenactment group from St. Louis.

more prevalent than in the decisive armor and cavalry victories by their grandsons in Desert Storm. Those veterans who fought in Desert Storm, both active and reserve component soldiers, have experienced the shock and lethality of battle, as their grandfathers did some 50 years ago!

"Their legacy and stories are the areas we must focus on in the near-term through projects, exhibits, and additions that highlight their overwhelming superiority on the battlefield," said Purdy. "This is a large group of veterans and current duty-status soldiers whose ties to the museum must be exploited by pride in ownership. Many of those soldiers and their families have never enjoyed the museum, so we know there is a future audience out there for us to reach out to and ask to assist and support our efforts."

One effort in need of support is the acquisition of an M1-series tank to complete the Desert Storm exhibit. Included in this exhibit will be elements of General Franks VII Corps command and control actions, many of which have led to the present use of battlelabs to shape and design control of the battlespace. The museum has a captured Iraqi T-72 tank; it needs some help to obtain the M1.

Whether through donations, higher corporate sponsor participation, or endowments, the museum and foundation are examining ways to attract new visitors and spur new growth. To compete in the future as the cornerstone-showcase of the Army's technology center of excellence, the museum and foundation has to raise money and its level of support.



"Those are issues the Armor and Cavalry Foundation are meeting regularly on as we move into the future," said Purdy.

Future long-term projects will include an expansion of the already popular "Cold War" exhibit, featuring actual segments of the Berlin Wall and familiar border posts. There will also be a move towards "interactive videos," where museum visitors can walk through armor and cavalry's history, as well as use some early versions of the training equipment mounted warriors practiced on.

These equipment exhibits will chronicle the Army's move into expanded simulation training, virtual reality, and the digitized communication battlefield, highlighting many of those same soldiers who fought in, and brought their ideas back from, Desert Storm.

"Those Desert Storm veterans are the ones who are shaping Force XXI, by applying battlefield techniques and enhanced communications to ensure lethality and survivability in 21st Century battlefields," Purdy said. "If we are unable to attract a core of those Desert Storm veterans in support of the museum, I don't think we'll be as successful in highlighting armor and cavalry's continued role and necessity for tomorrow's warfighters. We need them as advocates of the Patton Museum, advocates of the Home of Mounted Warfare and Fort Knox, and advocates of armor and cavalry soldiers past, present, and future!"

John Rickey was the Fort Knox Public Affairs Officer when this article was written.